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CIA turns to academia for new ideas, theories

The Central Intelligence Agency has turned again to American colleges and universities for research data and advice.

From conferences with professors to outside consultants from academia to scholars in residence at the CIA, the agency is soliciting help from "the best minds in the country," according to Robert Gates, deputy director of intelligence.

"What we are after is people who will challenge us constructively, offer us a different perspective, who will stir up the pot a bit and who will help us consider all points of view, particularly the unorthodox," Gates said. "Large bureaucracies like this one have difficulty promoting imagination and creativity."

"Can you imagine what people would say if we contended that no one in the academic world has anything to offer us, that there is no information or perspective that could help us do our job?"

This realization from a government agency that it does not know everything, we believe, is healthy. The CIA — or any other government agency — hasn't got a monopoly on the information market. Pooling information from

sources outside government should help the CIA avoid re-inventing the wheel as well as inject new ideas or theories about world events.

The link between the CIA and American universities is a remarkable reverse of former trends. Twenty years ago, the CIA was all but banished from academia. The link was restored during the Carter administration and has been growing since.

The goal of any aspect of information gathering is a stronger CIA to battle the ever-growing problem of terrorism. Terrorists are elusive enemies and there are no district battlegrounds.

Considering the number of terrorist attacks against Americans in 1985, strengthening the intelligence gathering capabilities of the CIA is not out of line. With a better intelligence network, the United States could theoretically prevent terrorists attacks beforehand, or maybe determine the location of terrorists camps in preparation for retaliatory strikes.

Restored ties between the CIA and universities is not a final answer to worldwide terrorism, but more information and new ideas may help in the struggle.